

JUNE 1983

The latter part of May saw the first brood of Stonechats at the Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve, Kestrels raising five young in a box at Weeton, and at least three pairs of Barn Owls on eggs in boxes about the Fylde.

Into June, four pairs of Little Grebe and three or four pairs of Great Crested Grebes were on Marton Mere where a Ruddy Duck, present throughout the month, was seen displaying to a young Mallard. During the month up to seven broods of Mallard and five broods of Coot were raised at the Mere, three pairs of Reed Warblers were nest building at Preesall Flash, Ringed Plovers were on eggs at Cockerham, and the pair of Mute Swans at Preesall successfully hatched three cygnets by the 18th, but unfortunately only one of these remained alive by the month end. Information regarding breeding birds in the Fylde has been somewhat sparse, so strengths and weaknesses of locally breeding birds must unfortunately pass undocumented for another year - lets hope that we can improve on this for the future.

Late spring passage birds in the form of 2 Wheatears and a Golden Plover at Cockerham on the 5th, marked the end of that seasons movements of the more common migrants, but on the same day, at Conder Green, a less common form of one of our summer visitors appeared - an immature Arctic Tern in the so called "Portlandica" plumage was identified by Owen Roberts (confirmed from articles in British Birds).

On the 6th an immature Glaucous Gull was on St. Annes beach, where, on the next day following a terrible hail storm, at least 300 Knot, a few Grey Plover and some Bar Tailed Godwits were found dead, apparently killed by the fall of very large hailstones.

A new species for the area was the Whiskered Tern identified by Phil Slade at Marton Mere on the 9th - the tern was present on the 9th for about thirty minutes, then reappeared during the morning of the 10th for fifty minutes before disappearing, reappeared again for a further two hours the same evening before once again doing its vanishing trick. Following much searching by observers it was concluded that the tern had moved on. During the evening of the 10th, an "odd-looking" tern was seen briefly flying south over Carleton - was it or wasn't it?

A drake Goosander was at Conder Green, and a Green Sandpiper at Preesall on the 12th, the latter bird appearing midway through that period usually identified as the watershed between spring and autumn passages.

Seabird records were few, referring in the main to occasional Kittiwakes, Gannets and Fulmars. The 8th saw up to 6 Fulmars off Central Prom, 5 more on the 14th, and a maximum of 10 Gannets off South Prom also on 14th. Some excitement was introduced to the scene when a dashing Arctic Skua was in amongst the terns off Squires Gate on the 18th, and a Pomarine Skua was over the shore at Pilling later in the month. The only Manx Shearwaters recorded were 2 off Central Prom and 4 off Starr Gate on the 29th.

Len Blacow had an interesting two minutes interlude late in the evening of the 15th - 23.00, at the M55 roundabout at Peel he encountered a Little Owl, two minutes later further along Preston New Road, a Barn Owl - this second bird may well have been the one recorded regularly by several observers at the Mere.

A roost of juvenile Starlings near Fleetwood Power Station held up to 3,000 birds during the month, but a much larger one of some 30,000 was established at Wilkinsons G.P. near Preesall. (Does anyone know of any other roosts?).

The first signs of autumn passage being underway came on the 24th when a Common Sandpiper appeared at the Mere, and 14 Spotted Redshank, 16 Black Tailed Godwits, and 3 Ruff were on Warton Marsh. A pair of Garganey visited the Mere on the 25th, the drake almost into eclipse. The 26th saw more migrants appear, with the shore at Pilling proving attractive to 2 Whimbrel, 450 Lapwing, 3 Golden Plover, 8 Sanderling, and a Common Sandpiper. At the same site on the same day (26th) a Peregrine was seen at the wader roost, 2 Great Crested Grebes on the sea, a Wheatear on the shore, and the previously mentioned Pomarine Skua completed the picture. Curlew flocks were encountered about the Fylde and Over Wyre towards the month end, with birds in flight over the Mere (3) and Carleton (2) on the 27th. A Common Sandpiper was heard calling in flight over Carleton late in the evening on the 27th.

Records from just outside our recording area included 2 Green Sandpipers, a pair of Goosander, and a Tufted Duck with 10 young at Street Gravel Pits on the 24th (and a late May sighting was that of a Hoopoe at Heysham on the 16th).

JULY 1983

Weather reminiscent of that of the long hot summer of 1976, affectionately known as the year of the drought, was the dominant feature of July. The anticyclonic conditions provided a long settled period of hot, bright, sunny days with light variable winds, which must have been much appreciated by migrants moving south - but not so by frustrated watchers on the ground. This lack of birds forced some members to travel to distant places in the hope of satisfying the need to see new birds - Norfolk was the most popular destination - are there no birds in the Fylde?

During sea watches from south promenade on the 1st, 9 Gannets, 3 Common Scoter, 4 Kittiwakes, 3 Guillemots and 40 Sandwich Terns passed south, and the following day from the same watch point, 9 Fulmar, 2 Scoter, 25 Gannets, 1 Manx Shearwater, 3 Sandwich Terns, 9 Common Terns, and 2 Auks were counted. On the 4th at Squires Gate, 3 Guillemots, a Razorbill and 2 Gannets were found dead, the victims of oiling, whilst on the 7th at Grammes Bay, a dead Great Skua was picked up on the tideline, the bird had been dead for a few days.

On the 3rd, 49 Black Tailed Godwits and a Spotted Redshank were in flight over Warton Marsh, 3 Common Sandpipers were at Conder Green, and 4 more at Pilling, with the 400 Curlew at Barnabys Sands indicating that that species was moving down to the salt marshes in some numbers.

Ruff appeared at a few localities, the largest numbers being seen at the traditional site of Newton Marsh. At this time of year the vast majority of birds seen are males in heavy moult, and the 10 at Newton Marsh on the 10th, and the 12 at the same site on the 22nd were such birds. Singlers appeared at Fleetwood and on Warton Marsh, with a further 2 at Cockerham on the 31st.

Early in the month 3 Mergansers were on the River Wyre at Arm Hill, and at this site on the 7th were 327 Oystercatchers, 54 Bar Tailed Godwits, 6 Common Sandpipers and 22 Shelduck with at least 21 young birds. On the same date at St. Annes, 5 Great Crested Grebes were back on the sea, possibly from inland breeding sites, or were young non-breeders.

The first of the autumn Greenshank (2) and Whimbrel (1) appeared on the 9th amongst the waders at the Pilling Shore roost - this Whimbrel was the first of a fairly large movement of the species that occurred during the last two weeks of the month. On the 17th, 6 were at Fleetwood Power Station (R. Wyre) 5 at Pilling, 7 at Cockersands, and a single at Conder Green - on the 19th, 4 went north off south promenade - 21st saw one over

the Mere, on 22nd 5 at Pilling, with 10 there on 23rd - on 24th, 28 were in the Pilling area - the 25th saw another in flight over the Mere, then 5 more the following day, plus a single at Warton Marsh - 2 over the Mere on 27th - 26 at Pilling on the 30th, these reduced to 3 by the 31st.

The water level at Fleetwood Power Station flyash tip lagoon was way down by the 10th, but nevertheless proved attractive to 15 Redshank, a Greenshank, 9 Common Sandpiper, and a noisy Little Ringed Plover in agitated flight over the edge of the nearby tip area. A juvenile Stonechat was at the fly ash tip on the 17th, a Glaucous Gull on the 19th, a duck Shoveler on the 22nd with young (this bird had apparently raised its young inside the main tip area).

The 10th saw the first returning Short-eared Owl on Stalmine Moss.

Regular observations at the Mere gave some idea of the wader passage taking place (see attached sheet at end of newsletter), and also established successes and failures of the breeding birds. At least 3 pairs of Great Crested Grebes attempted breeding, and by the month end one pair had hatched 3 young. Five pairs of Little Grebes raised broods of 2, 3, 3, 4, and 5. Mallard raised 12 broods, but possible predation significantly reduced the young birds during the first few days after hatching. Tufted Duck had very limited success with two broods of 3 and 1 appearing, but only one from each brood survived. A Shoveler appeared with 5 young. A pair of Mute Swans built a nest, but the nest was probably robbed. About fifteen broods of Coot appeared, (an increase on 1982) - a maximum count of 160 Coot indicated an influx of birds to the area. Moorhen numbers remained stable with four broods raised. A pair of Oystercatchers bred on the meadow east of the Mere and 3 young fledged. At least one pair of Reed Warblers were feeding young by the 24th. Reduced numbers of Sedge Warblers and Whitethroat may be a reflection of the dry conditions in the Sahel region of Africa that these two species experienced during the winter months. Throughout the month at the Mere watchers regularly recorded Barn Owl, the drake Ruddy Duck, an eclipse drake Garganey, a duck of the same species; but low numbers of hirundines and passerines were probably a result of the settled weather conditions. An indication of the winter to come were the 36 Linnets, 16 Greenfinch, and 17 Goldfinch feeding on thistles on the 31st.

The wader roost at Pilling usually provides plenty to see, but to a Peregrine provides a ready supply of food. The roost counters on the 23rd and 24th had the good fortune to see one of these magnificent birds - possibly a non-breeder, or an unsuccessful breeder from local fells. Counts of some of the birds at the roost on the 23rd included 36 Golden Plover, 2 Greenshanks, 300 Dunlin, 12 Grey Plover, 10 Whimbrel and 10 Grey Herons. The following day a count along the shore from Pilling to the R. Cocker produced 14 Whimbrel, 60 Redshank, 350 Dunlin, 8 Greenshank, 17 Common Sandpipers, 104 Golden Plover, 2 adult Curlew Sandpipers, 60 Pied Wagtails, 80 Curlew and 3 Great Crested Grebes. The same day saw 240 Curlew, and 235 Golden Plover at Thurnham, 10 Common Sandpiper at Conder Green, and 2 Little Terns at Cockersands. A wader count in south Fylde at Warton Marsh produced 350 Black Tailed Godwits, 87 Golden Plover, a Whimbrel, 4 Common Sandpipers and a single Green Sandpiper. The largest Golden Plover flock during the month, was on some 500 birds at Fluke Hall on the morning of the 28th.

Two Little Terns off south promenade on 27th, a single off Rossall Point on the 28th and 2 Arctic Terns at Conder Green on the 30th, indicated the possible start of their southerly movements - the Sandwich Terns having already begun theirs.

The last day of the month saw flocks of finches at the Mere and Over Wyre, the first young Great Crested Grebes at the Mere, a pair of Red Legged Partridge with 6 young on Pilling Moss, and the first Wheatear of the autumn (a young bird) at Pilling.

A late note for June 16th - the corpse of a dead Cormorant found on the R. Wyre by Bob Danson, had been ringed as a nestling on the 7th June 1982 at Ynys Gnylan Bach, Aberdaron, Gwynedd.

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Records for possible inclusion submitted by:-

L.G. Blacow, A. Cooke, R. Danson, P. Davies, S. Eaves, S. Gibson
P. Guy, R.A. Hall, G. Hudson, M. Jones, A. Myerscough, O. Roberts

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The following article has been submitted by Phil Slade:-

"The Evening had been a pretty uneventful one - as was to be expected on the 9th June, lots of Swift and a few hirundines hawking insects over the mere plus several broods of Mallard to be counted as well as keeping an eye on nesting Grebes, Coot etc.

Eventually I wandered over the tip area searching for a phylloscopus warbler that was calling incessantly, as usual I kept a watch on the Mere, scanning periodically. It was during one of these that I noticed the characteristic dipping flight of a marsh tern in the far South East corner of the Mere, some 250 yards away. Aware of the date and the possibilities I quickly made my way to the Mere edge when the tern obligingly came to the centre of the open water some 50 yards away. There was no mistaking this highly distinctive bird - a black cap extending over the ear coverts to join the nape where it merged into a silvery grey mantle and upperwings. A brilliant white cheek patch extended forward to the base of the shortish and stout blood red bill. The cheeks were in stark contrast to the throat and underparts which were dark grey, ending at the white undertail coverts. In flight the bird performed beautifully down to 20 yards, feeding over the emergent vegetation and occasionally plunge diving in the open water, the rather stiff winged attitude and the open spread, grey centred tail being very noticeable.

I was becoming rather concerned that this bird would vanish without trace, and after The Mystery of the Disappearing Avocet I decided to take no chances. "Frank" I thought, Frank Bird who can always be found in his Preston New Road garden when he is not birding - in fact his garden is as immaculate as mine is untidy. Sure enough, as I screamed to a halt outside his house there he was tending the grass verge and did not protest as I bundled him into the car.

Of course it had to happen, in 7 or 8 minutes the bird had flown and I gradually became more dejected as we searched until dusk without luck. Convinced as I was that it was merely a fly through, Paul and I made the effort the next morning and arrived at 5.20 a.m. and there it was, literally the first bird we saw as it flew directly across our view as we drove onto the Caravan site. Frustratingly it again disappeared after a short while, lost to view high to the North East.

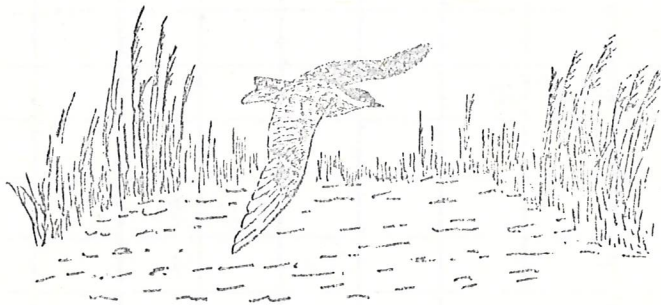
Several people turned up in the evening, more in desperate hope than in anticipation, I think "gripped" is the operative term but during much banter about stringing etc. one observer lifted his 'bins' and calmly announced the presence of Whiskered Tern whereupon the mood of the small flock of birders changed dramatically as superb views were had by all until it left for the last time at dusk.

I am only sorry that more did not share this lovely tern but who knows perhaps next year another may appear, certainly it is only a matter of time before Marton Mere is graced with the presence of the closely related White Winged Black Tern, an equally attractive bird, albeit not as rare."

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GENERAL NOTICES

1. Owen Roberts wants all records past and present relating to Winmarleigh Moss.
2. Malcolm Evans wants records of all sightings of Clouded Yellow butterflies from this summer.



MARTON MEKE																		
UNDER PASSAGE																		
July 1983	DUNLIN	REDSHANK	GREENSHANK	COMMON SANDPEP	BUCK THROATED GODWIT	CURLEW	WINTERBEC											
1st																		
2nd																		
3rd																		
4th						2												
5th		7				1												
6th		14																
7th	1	9				8												
8th	1	1																
9th		2	1✓	1*		3												
10th	NO VISIT.																	
11th		5		1*		9												
12th	1	3				4												
13th		5		1*		11												
14th		3			3✓													
15th																		
16th		6				1												
17th																		
18th																		
19th	2✓	14																
20th																		
21st					6✓	4	1											
22nd				3*		2												
23rd	NO VISIT.																	
24th						1												
25th						1	1✓											
26th	2✓	8					5✓											
27th		4	2✓			3✓	2✓											
28th				1*														
29th						1												
30th						1												
31st	2					9												

TOTAL 9 81 3 7 9 61 9

* BIRDS DOWN FEEDING.

ALL BIRDS PASSED IN A WESTERNLY DIRECTION (EXCEPT THOSE MARKED OTHERWISE).

✓ NW, ✓ SW, ✓ S.